

Hamas plans to elect new leader soon

GAZA CITY: Hamas is preparing to hold internal elections to rebuild its leadership following Israel's killing of several of the group's top figures during the conflict in Gaza. "Internal preparations are still ongoing in order to hold the elections at the appropriate time in areas where conditions on the ground allow it," a Hamas leader said on Monday. The vote is expected to take place "in the first months of this year", he added. Much of the group's top leadership has been decimated since Oct 2023. The conflict has also left Gaza Strip's more than two million residents in dire humanitarian conditions. The leadership renewal process includes the formation of a new 50-member Shura, a consultative body dominated by religious figures. Its members are selected every four years by Hamas's three branches: the Gaza Strip, the occupied West Bank and the movement's external leadership. Hamas prisoners in Israel are also eligible to vote. During previous elections, held before Oct 2023, members across Gaza and the West Bank used to gather at different locations, including mosques, to choose the Shura. That council is responsible, every four years, for electing the 18-member political bureau and its chief, who serves as Hamas's overall leader. Another Hamas source close to the process said the timing of the political bureau elections remains uncertain "given the circumstances our people are going through". After Israel killed former Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July 2024, the group chose its then-Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar as his successor. Israel accused Sinwar of masterminding the Oct 7 rais. He too was killed by Israeli forces in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, three months after Haniyeh's assassination.—AFP

Anti-Hamas militia claims killing cop

GAZA CITY: An armed group opposed to Hamas and suspected of being backed by Israel said on Monday that it had killed a top police officer from the Palestinian movement in the southern Gaza Strip. The group, known as the Popular Forces, got its start in the southern Rafah governorate, where it was accused of aid looting, though its late leader had presented it as being "dedicated to Hamas's overthrow". The killing comes as Hamas seeks to reassert itself across the areas where it still holds sway, though more than half of the territory remains under Israeli military control. According to Hamas, the head of the police investigations department in Khan Yunis, Mahmoud Ahmed al Astal, was "assassinated" in the coastal Al Mawasi area on Monday. "According to initial investigations, the shooting was carried out from a car occupied by several agents of the Israeli occupation," it said in a statement, apparently referring to armed groups backed by Israel. Hamas said security services had opened a probe into the incident. The Popular Forces claimed responsibility in a video sent to journalists, with one of the group's leaders, Hossam al Astal, saying the target had "killed many people".—AFP



A WORKER assembles boxes for a sweet, known as Al Shatwi (winter), at a factory in Deir al Balah, Gaza Strip. The factory resumed operations last month after a closure of two years.—AFP

Opposition grows in US Congress to Iran action

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: Opposition to any potential US military action against Iran is growing across party lines in Congress, with lawmakers warning that an attack could backfire and would also violate the US Constitution. Senior Democrats and Republicans alike have questioned the Trump administration's threats of military intervention as Iran faces widespread protests driven by economic hardship and calls for regime change. They argue that American involvement — particularly military action framed as support for protesters — could undermine the very movement it seeks to help. Republican lawmakers such as Senator Rand Paul and Representatives Thomas Massie and Marjorie Taylor Greene have emphasised that the United States should prioritise domestic issues and avoid what they describe as "endless foreign wars". Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, cautioned that a military strike intended to assist protesters could have the opposite effect. Speaking to CNN, Warner

recalled the consequences of earlier US intervention in Iran. "The last time America intervened militarily in Iran was 1953, when a CIA-led coup overthrew the Iranian regime to protect oil," Warner said. "And that, ultimately, most historians would say, was what led to the ayatollah's rise in the 1970s." Warner said American intervention in Iran has historically produced "unintended consequences" and warned that military action now could strengthen, rather than weaken, the current leadership. Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky has also spoken out forcefully against military escalation. Appearing on ABC's This Week, Paul said he was sceptical that bombing Iran would achieve its stated aims. "I don't think I have ever heard a president say they may take military action to protect protesters," Paul said. "I'm not sure that striking Iran will have the effect that is intended." Senator Paul warned that US military action could end up unifying Iranians behind the government, even those currently protesting against the clerical leadership. While expressing support for democratic aspirations, Paul

argued that military force was not the answer. "We wish freedom and liberation the best across the world," he said. "But I don't think it's the job of the American government to be involved with every freedom movement around the world. ... Bombing is not the answer." The senator also warned that any military action would lead to civilian casualties. "How do you drop a bomb in the middle of a crowd or a protest and protect the people there?" he asked. The congressional pushback has also taken legislative form. Senators Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Tim Kaine of Virginia have introduced legislation that would bar the use of federal funds for military force in or against Iran unless Congress explicitly authorises it. The measure has been co-sponsored by Senators Elizabeth Warren, Jeff Merkley and Chris Van Hollen. The proposed legislation points out that only Congress has the power to declare war under Article I, Section 8 of the United States Constitution. It notes that "Congress has not declared war against Iran nor has Congress enacted a specific statutory authorisation for the use of force against Iran."

Somalia cancels all agreements with UAE

MOGADISHU: Somalia cancelled all agreements with the United Arab Emirates on Monday amid tensions over Israel's recognition of Somaliland and reports that the Emiratis used Somali territory to help a Yemeni separatist flee his country. "Having carefully assessed recent developments and exercising its constitutional authority, the Council of Ministers has annulled all agreements concluded with the United Arab Emirates... including bilateral security and defence cooperation agreements," the Somali government said in a statement. There have been deepening differences between Somalia and the UAE over a number of issues. The UAE is seen as quietly supporting the move by Israel last month to recognise Somaliland, the first to do so since the self-proclaimed republic declared independence from Somalia in 1991. The UAE built and operates a large deep-water port and military base at Berbera in Somaliland. Tensions spiked again last week after Saudi Arabia accused the UAE of helping a Yemeni separatist leader, Aidarous Al Zubaidi, escape by boat and plane via Berbera and the Somali capital Mogadishu to Abu Dhabi. Somalia's immigration agency said at the time it was investigating an "alleged unauthorised use of Somalia's national airspace and airports". The Somali government did not directly mention the recognition of Somaliland or the alleged escape of Zubaidi in its statement cancelling deals with the UAE. It said the decision was "based on credible reports and compelling evidence concerning hostile actions undermining national sovereignty, territorial unity, and the political independence of the country". "The decision of the cabinet today comes after a long period of endurance by the leadership of the federal government".—AFP

Paramount sues in hostile bid to buy Warner Bros

NEW YORK: Paramount Skydance said on Monday that it filed a lawsuit against Warner Brothers Discovery (WBD) as it presses an unwelcomed bid to buy the CNN-parent company. Paramount's suit seeks to compel the WBD board to provide certain information to shareholders that it argues will cast its offer in a more favorable light. The suit, and a letter to WBD shareholders by Paramount Skydance chief executive David Ellison, are the latest moves in a saga spanning several months. Television and film titan WBD put out word in late October that it was open to acquisition offers, with its board subsequently accepting a bid by streaming giant Netflix. WBD formally rejected an offer from Paramount Skydance for the entire company. The Netflix offer favored by the board does not include buying WBD television properties such as CNN and Discovery, which would belong to a newly created and publicly traded company called Global Networks if the deal is sealed. Paramount Skydance accuses the WBD board of failing to present shareholders with details needed to compare its offer to the Netflix bid.—AFP

UK opens probe into X over Grok deepfake concerns

LONDON: Britain's media regulator has launched an investigation into Elon Musk's X over concerns its Grok AI chatbot was creating sexually intimate deepfake images in violation of its duty to protect people from illegal content. The Ofcom probe piles additional pressure on the social media platform of the world's richest man, which is already facing a growing public outcry as well as criminal and regulatory probes around the world, from France to India. "Reports of Grok being used to create and share illegal non-consensual

intimate images and child sexual abuse material on X have been deeply concerning," it said in a statement. Platforms must protect people in Britain from illegal content, the regulator said, adding that it would not "hesitate to investigate where we suspect companies are failing in their duties, especially where there's a risk of harm to children". When asked on Monday about the investigation, X pointed to a previous statement in which it said it takes action against illegal content on the platform, including child sexual abuse material, by removing it,

permanently suspending accounts, and working with governments and law enforcement as necessary. "Anyone using or prompting Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," it said. Starmer terms Grok images disgusting The regulator is under pressure to act after Prime Minister Keir Starmer called the images produced by Grok "disgusting" and "unlawful". Musk's X had to "get a grip" on Grok, he added.

Following initial action against porn sites that did not have effective age checks, the Grok case will likely be the first big test of Britain's online safety law, which was enacted in 2023 but is being implemented in stages by Ofcom. Asked on Monday whether X could be banned, Business Secretary Peter Kyle said: "Yes, of course," but he noted that the power to do so lay with Ofcom. Musk wrote that in focusing on Grok and X, Britain "just wants to suppress free speech". A spokesperson for Starmer

rejected that claim, saying the government was concerned about child sexual abuse imagery and violence against women and girls. "It is wrong, it is unlawful and we are not going to tolerate it," the spokesperson said. Tech minister Liz Kendall welcomed Ofcom's formal investigation, adding that it must be completed swiftly. Creating or sharing non-consensual intimate images or child sexual abuse material, including AI-generated sexual imagery, is illegal in Britain. Additionally, tech platforms must

prevent British users from encountering illegal content and remove it once they become aware of it. International outcry X has faced condemnation in other countries over the feature, which can produce images of women and minors in skimpy clothing. French officials have reported X to prosecutors and regulators, calling the content "manifestly illegal", while Indian authorities have also demanded explanations. Indonesia and Malaysia temporarily blocked Grok over the weekend.—Reuters



MEXICO CITY: Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum addresses a press conference at Palacio Nacional. Sheinbaum said she had discussed her country's security concerns with Donald Trump after the US president threatened ground attacks against drug cartels.—AFP



KADUNA: Students gather near the gate of a school as educational institutions reopened in Nigeria two months after closing due to security concerns.—Reuters



TENERIFE: A policeman walks over salt in a cargo vessel carrying almost 10 metric tons of cocaine concealed in a shipment on Spain's Canary Islands.—Reuters

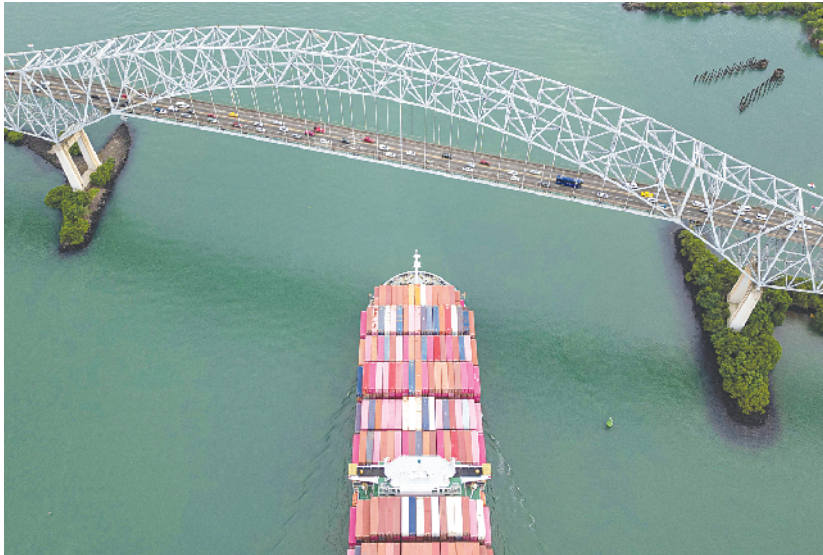


NURSES protest outside the Columbia University's Irving Medical Center demanding higher wages and better security at hospitals to reduce violent episodes.—AFP

150,000 nurses on largest-ever strike in New York City

NEW YORK: Some 15,000 nurses went on strike in New York City on Monday at three large private hospital groups over pay and conditions. Officials declared a state of emergency over the work stoppage, which the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) said on its website came after months of bargaining for a new contract reached a deadlock. The association says it is the largest strike by nurses in the city's history. Picket lines were set up at several private hospitals across New York including facilities of New York-Presbyterian, Montefiore Bronx, and Mount Sinai. "Unfortunately, greedy hospital executives have decided to put profits above safe patient care and force nurses out on strike when we would rather be at the bedside of our patients," Nancy Hagans, NYSNA's president, said. "Hospital management refuses to

address our most important issues - patient and nurse safety." New York's Democratic socialist Mayor Zohran Mamdani rallied in support of the nurses, saying "we know that during 9/11 it was nurses that tended to the wounded". "We know that during the global pandemic, it was nurses that came into work, even at the expense of their own health," he said, wearing a red NYSNA scarf. The hospital groups involved discharged or transferred a number of patients, cancelled some surgeries and drafted in temporary staff. A Mount Sinai spokesperson told CBS News that "unfortunately, NYSNA decided to move forward with its strike while refusing to move on from its extreme economic demands, which we cannot agree to, but we are ready with 1,400 qualified and specialised nurses - and prepared to continue to provide safe patient care for as long as this strike lasts"—AFP



PANAMA CITY: A Taiwanese cargo ship sails out of the Panama Canal, on the Pacific side. Panamanian forces began joint training with the US navy last week to protect the strategic shipping route after President Jose Raul Mulino declared an end to tensions with the United States.—AFP



BERLIN: Swans make their way across ice on a frozen canal amid freezing conditions continue in the German capital.—AFP